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SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC EFFORT REVEALS FULL-BLOWN MALAGASY
POLITICAL CRISIS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT

11. (C) SUMMARY. DIPLOMATS MET ON JANUARY 22 FIRST WITH ANTANANARIVO MAYOR ANDRY "TGV" RAJOELINA AND IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER TO SEEK COMMON GROUND THAT MIGHT CALM THE WORSENING POLITICAL CRISIS IN MADAGASCAR. THE TWO DISCUSSIONS, EACH LASTING ABOUT TWO HOURS, REVEALED A FAR GREATER DEGREE OF POLARIZATION AND RISK OF CONFRONTATION THAN HAD BEEN EVIDENT BEFORE. THE MAYOR, FOR HIS PART, HAS ASSUMED A BROAD, SELF-APPOINTED, AND UNCOMPROMISING ROLE AS POPULIST LEADER OF THE NATION'S ENTIRE POPULATION -- WHICH HE CLAIMS IS OVERWHELMINGLY FED UP WITH RAVALOMANANA'S CORRUPT LEADERSHIP -- AND HE OPENLY STATED THAT HIS GOAL IS REGIME CHANGE VIA A TRANSITION GOVERNMENT AND SOME SORT OF REFERENDUM REVEALING THE TRUE EXTENT OF POPULAR DISCONTENT. TGV SEEMED UNINTERESTED IN FINDING COMMON GROUND AND MAY HAVE PASSED A POINT OF NO RETURN IN HIS SOURED RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PRESIDENT AND GOVERNMENT. THE TWO MINISTERS, FOR THEIR PARTS, CLEARLY SEE THE EXTREME DANGERS INVOLVED AS THE MAYOR CALLS FOR ANOTHER UNAUTHORIZED PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION THIS SATURDAY. THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THE MAYOR IS BEING MANIPULATED BY EX-RATSIRAKA LOYALISTS AND EVEN BY THE EXILED FORMER PRESIDENT HIMSELF FROM PARIS, AND DO NOT SEE THE MAYOR AS A TRUSTWORTHY OR LEGITIMATE PARTNER IN A NEGOTIATION THEY CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN SEEKING, IN VAIN, FOR SOME TIME. THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF THE CURRENT CONFRONTATION BEING EXPLOITED BY AN UNNAMED, UNSEEN "THIRD COLUMN" WHO MIGHT SPARK VIOLENCE OR EVEN KILL THE MAYOR IN AN EFFORT TO CREATE 2002-LIKE CONDITIONS IN THE STREETS OF THE CAPITAL. THE DIPLOMATS WERE UNITED IN SENDING SOBERING MESSAGES TO BOTH SIDES THAT WE ALSO SEE THE SITUATION AS EXPLOSIVE, THAT A COMMITMENT TO NON-VIOLENCE IS KEY, THAT ALL SIDES NEED TO STEP BACK AND AVOID INADVERTENTLY SPARKING VIOLENCE, AND THAT ANY RESORT TO EXTRACONSTITUTIONAL ACTIONS WILL BE MET BY PARTNER GOVERNMENTS WITH CONDEMNATION AND A LIKELY SUSPENSION OF ASSISTANCE NEEDED BY THE MALAGASY PEOPLE, THE PRESIDENT, FOR HIS PART, LEFT TODAY FOR SOUTH AFRICA (FOR AN EXTRAORDINARY SADC SUMMIT ON ZIMBABWE NOT TO BE HELD UNTIL MONDAY), THUS DELIBERATELY ABSENTING HIMSELF FROM MADAGASCAR FOR THIS COMING WEEKEND. HE APPEARS TO BE WILLING TO RECEIVE AMBASSADORS IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS RETURN TO HEAR OUR THOUGHTS AND DISCUSS POSSIBLE CALMING MEASURES. HOWEVER, THE SITUATION COULD HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY DEGRADED BY THEN. WE AND THE FRENCH, AND PERHAPS OTHERS, ARE ISSUING UPDATED WARDEN MESSAGES IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) I JOINED MY EU, GERMAN, UNDP AND NORWEGIAN COUNTERPARTS ON THURSDAY NIGHT IN A TWO-HOUR MEETING AT THE EU RESIDENCE WITH 'TANA MAYOR TGV. (NOTE: FRANCE AND SOUTH AFRICA WERE ALSO ASSOCIATED WITH AND AWARE OF THIS INITIATIVE BUT UNABLE TO ATTEND. END NOTE.) THIS FOLLOWED A SUGGESTION FROM FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND CURRENT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT JACQUES SYLLA THAT AN OUTSIDE EFFORT FROM RESIDENT DIPLOMATS TOWARD BOTH TGV AND THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE WELCOME AND PERHAPS EFFECTIVE IN CALMING DOWN A DANGEROUSLY ESCALATING POLITICAL SITUATION HERE. SYLLA CONFIRMED THIS VIEW IN A TETE-A-TETE WITH ME ON THURSDAY MORNING, DURING WHICH HE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE IN MALAGASY CULTURE OF MAINTAINING OPEN DIALOGUE AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONS -- BOTH

SEVERELY FRAYED AFTER WEEKS OF HARDENING PUBLIC RHETORIC BETWEEN THE MAYOR'S CAMP AND THE GOVERNMENT. TGV CAME TO THE MEETING ALONE AND LAUNCHED THE DISCUSSION WITH A LENGTHY CATALOGUE OF GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE PRESIDENT AND THE GOVERNMENT, ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION, RECITATIONS OF WRONGS AGAINST HIM IN HIS ROLE AS MAYOR, AND CLAIMS THAT HE IS NOW THE UNDISPUTED LEADER OF BOTH THE OPPOSITION AND THE DISAFFECTED MAJORITY OF THE MALAGASY POPULATION WHO HAVE HAD IT WITH RAVALOMANANA. MANY OF HIS COMPLAINTS HAVE SOME BASIS IN FACT, ALTHOUGH IT IS ENTIRELY UNCLEAR HOW MANY MALAGASY ARE SUFFICIENTLY UNHAPPY AS TO WISH A RETURN TO A 2002-STYLE PUBLIC CONFRONTATION OR REALLY WANT OR EXPECT IMMEDIATE REGIME CHANGE.

13. (C) TGV CLAIMED, HOWEVER, THAT THE MAJORITY WANT RAVALOMANANA OUT NOW, AND DEFINED AS HIS OBJECTIVE IMMEDIATE REGIME CHANGE VIA A TRANSITION GOVERNMENT THAT WOULD COME TO POWER THROUGH SOME UNDEFINED POPULAR REFERENDUM AGAINST RAVALOMANANA'S RULE. ASKED WHETHER HE THOUGHT THE PRESIDENT WOULD GO ALONG WITH SUCH A PLAN, TGV ADMITTED THAT HE WOULD NOT. WE DIPLOMATS THEN TOOK TURNS EXPLAINING THE UNACCEPTABLE NATURE OF EXTRACONSTITUTIONAL ACTIONS AND THE LIKELY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IF THEY FOLLOW, USING RECENT EVENTS IN GUINEA AND MAURITANIA AS EXAMPLES. TGV WAS UNMOVED AND ONLY RATCHETED UP HIS POPULIST RHETORIC ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF THE MALAGASY PEOPLE AND REITERATING HIS OVER-REACHING DEMANDS THAT CERTAIN MINISTERS BE FIRED, THAT

THE PRESIDENT SELL HIS RECENTLY-ACQUIRED PRESIDENTIAL AIRCRAFT, ETC. I ASKED HIM DIRECTLY WHETHER HE HAS REACHED A POINT OF NO RETURN IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRESIDENT AND WHETHER HE IS STILL OPEN TO DIALOGUE WITH HIM; HIS ANSWER WAS EQUIVOCAL. IN RESPONSE TO HIS ASSERTION THAT HE IS "IN PERFECT CONTROL" OF THE OPPOSITION AND OF MASS EVENTS LIKE HIS NEXT PLANNED PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION ON SATURDAY AT AMBOHIJATOVA PARK, WE CAUTIONED THAT UNSEEN FORCES NEITHER ON HIS SIDE NOR THE PRESIDENT'S COULD EASILY TRY TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION FOR THEIR OWN GAIN, INCLUDING EVEN BY TRYING TO KILL THE MAYOR AND PINNING BLAME FOR THE ACT ON THE GOVERNMENT; THAT TOO HAD NO VISIBLE IMPACT ON HIS DEMEANOR. IN PARTING, WE ASSURED HIM THAT WE WOULD ALSO BE TALKING STRAIGHT WITH THE PRESIDENT AND GOVERNMENT AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO LOOK FOR GESTURES AND ACTIONS THAT WOULD HELP RE-ESTABLISH DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION. WE SAID THAT WE WOULD EXPECT HIM TO WELCOME AND RESPOND POSITIVELY TO ANY SUCH ACTIONS, IF THEY COME. HE CLOSED BY REASSURING US OF HIS OPENNESS TO DIALOGUE AND HIS COMMITMENT TO NON-VIOLENT CHANGE. WE WERE, HOWEVER, NOT THE LEAST BIT REASSURED BY HIS OVERALL PRESENTATION. FINALLY, TGV ASSURED US THAT "I AM NOT BEING MANIPULATED BY ANYONE; EVERYTHING I AM DOING IS ENTIRELY MY OWN IDEA AND OF MY OWN WILL."

14. (C) IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER WE MET (WITHOUT THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR) FOR TWO HOURS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER, THE MEETING BEING THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO OUR URGENT REQUEST TO SEE THE PRESIDENT BEFORE SATURDAY'S DEMONSTRATION. THE PRIME MINISTER EXPLAINED THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS LEAVING FRIDAY MORNING FOR A SADC SUMMIT IN SOUTH AFRICA AND DID NOT HAVE TIME TO RECEIVE US BEFORE THEN, BUT WOULD PROBABLY DO SO UPON HIS RETURN ON MONDAY. BOTH RETIRED GENERALS AND THUS VERY FAMILIAR WITH SECURITY ISSUES, THE TWO MINISTERS WRUNG THEIR HANDS ABOUT THE SECURITY DILEMMA THEY FACE ON SATURDAY: EITHER THEY RESPOND WITH FORCE AND RISK A CONFRONTATION, OR SIT BACK AND RISK ALLOWING DISORDER TO ESCALATE WHICH THEY WOULD THEN BE IN NO POSITION TO CONTROL. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID SEVERAL TIMES THAT THEY HAVE NOT YET DECIDED WHAT TO DO, AND HIMSELF RAISED THE SCENARIO IN WHICH THE MAYOR COULD BE ASSASSINATED BY A "THIRD COLUMN" AND THE BLAME STUCK ON THE GOVERNMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER NOTED THAT "WE MALAGASY DO THIS IN A CYCLICAL FASHION, BUILDING UP OUR COUNTRY AND THEN DESTROYING EVERYTHING WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH SUCH ACTIONS." THE TWO MINISTERS LAMENTED THE "HATE-SPEAK" NOW ON THE LOCAL AIRWAVES AND IN THE PRESS, EQUATING IT TO RWANDA IN 1994 AND MULLING OVER THEIR UNPLEASANT OPTIONS IN TERMS OF POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO IT. FOREIGN MINISTER RANJEVA ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DISPAIRED OF THEIR MANY FAILED EFFORTS -- INCLUDING THROUGH TGV'S MOTHER -- TO REACH OUT AND CREATE EFFECTIVE

LINE OF COMMUNICATION TO HIM THAT WOULD CIRCUMVENT THE
CIRCLE AROUND HIM. HE AND THE PRIME MINISTER BOTH SAID THEY
HAVE INTELLIGENCE LINKING TGV'S ACTIONS TO EXILED FORMER
PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA IN PARIS, AND THAT THEY HAVE CONCLUDED
THAT TGV IS BEING ENTIRELY MANIPULATED AND IS THUS NOT A
TRUSTWORTHY NEGOTIATING PARTNER AS THEY SEEK TO DEFUSE THE
SITUATION. WHO CAN WE NEGOTIATE WITH, THEY ASKED
RHETORICALLY?

15. (C) THE EU AMBASSADOR LAID OUT A NUMBER OF PRINCIPLES
SHARED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THE NEED FOR
DIALOGUE, THE IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING VIOLENCE, AND THE NEED
FOR BOTH SIDES TO SHOW RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUALS AND THE
ELECTED OFFICES ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE -- AND THE CONSEQUENCES
FOR MADAGASCAR AND ITS DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS IF THE SITUATION
CANNOT BE RIGHTED. WE EXPRESSED A PREFERENCE FOR DEPLOYING
MINIMUM FORCE TO CONTROL SATURDAY'S EVENT, NOTING THAT THIS
APPROACH HAD WORKED WELL AT LAST SATURDAY'S NON-VIOLENT
DEMONSTRATION. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT "THE SITUATION
THIS WEEKEND IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT THAN LAST WEEKEND, AND I
DO NOT KNOW IF WE CAN RISK TAKING THE SAME APPROACH." I
ASKED WHETHER THE RE-OPENING OF THE CLOSED TV STATION MIGHT
NOT BE AN APPROPRIATE GESTURE TO RE-ESTABLISH TRUST AND
DIALOGUE, TO GIVE THE GOM BACK SOME OF THE MORAL HIGH GROUND,
AND ALSO TO MOVE AWAY FROM RESTRICTIONS ON PRESS FREEDOM
WHICH ARE PROBLEMATIC IN OTHER RESPECTS. THE PRIME MINISTER
ASKED IN RESPONSE WHAT "GUARANTEE" WE COULD OFFER OF SUCCESS
IF THEY DO THAT (NONE, OF COURSE). THE FOREIGN MINISTER
POINTED OUT THAT THERE IS A LEGAL PROCEDURE BY WHICH THE
MAYOR COULD REQUEST THE RE-OPENING OF THE TV STATION, AND
THAT THIS COULD LEAD TO A LEGAL, FACE-SAVING DENOUEMENT;
HOWEVER, HE NOTED THAT TGV HAS CHOSEN NOT TO PURSUE THIS
AVENUE, AND OPINED THAT THIS IS PROOF THAT HE IS NOT SERIOUS.
THE PRIME MINISTER SUMMARIZED: "THE PROBLEMS ARE ELSEWHERE,
WE KNOW THAT THEY WANT A COUP D'ETAT. RE-OPENING THE STATION
WILL SOLVE NOTHING, BUT WE ARE OPEN TO DOING IT IF IT WOULD
HELP. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THEY WILL RESPOND IF WE EXTEND

OUR HAND. IN FACT, THE PRESIDENT DID EXTEND HIS HAND AND SO
FAR HAS GOTTEN NO REPLY." NONETHELESS, HE AGREED THAT TRYING
TO ENGINEER SOME SORT OF PEACE-MAKING MEETING BETWEEN THE
MAYOR AND PRESIDENT UPON THE LATTER'S RETURN HELD THE MOST
PROMISE FOR CALMING THESE ROILED WATERS -- BUT ITSELF WOULD
NOT BE EASY TO BRING ABOUT. RANJEVA ENDED THE DISCUSSION
WITH A QUASI-PROMISE THAT WE WILL ALL MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT
ON MONDAY NIGHT AFTER HIS RETURN. BOTH HE AND THE PRIME
MINISTER PRAISED THIS DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE FROM "TRUE
FRIENDS OF MADAGASCAR."

16. (C) I MET ON FRIDAY MORNING WITH THE FRENCH CHARGE TO
BRIEF HER ON THESE MEETINGS (WHICH SHE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO
ATTEND DUE TO A SENIOR VISITING "FRANCOPHONIE" DELEGATION
FROM THE ELYSEE). SHE SAID THAT SHE ALSO HAS PASSED
IDENTICAL AND EQUALLY URGENT MESSAGES TO BOTH SIDES BUT HAS
CONCLUDED THAT THE PROBLEM HAS BECOME THE "OUT-OF-CONTROL
MAYOR". SHE HAS WARNED HIM THAT FRANCE ALSO WOULD HAVE TO
SIDE WITH THE DULY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF MADAGASCAR IF ANY
EXTRA-LEGAL ACTIONS ARE UNDERTAKEN TO UNSEAT HIM. SHE
EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE SAFETY OF THE LARGE FRENCH
EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY IN MADAGASCAR AND CONFIRMED THAT THEY
ARE ISSUING ANOTHER WARDEN MESSAGE TODAY (AS WE ARE) WARNING
FRENCH CITIZENS OF "ESCALATING DANGER AND HIGH RISK" DOWNTOWN
ON SATURDAY AND PERHAPS BEYOND. SHE NOTED THAT THE ELYSEE
HELD A CRISIS MEETING ON THIS SITUATION THURSDAY, BUT SAID
THAT SHE DID NOT YET HAVE ANY READOUT ON ITS RESULTS. WE HAVE
NO CHOICES, SHE SAID, BUT TO HUNKER DOWN AND KEEP A LOW
PROFILE (READ: THE FRENCH COMMUNITY IS SO LARGE HERE THAT NO
EVACUATION IS FEASIBLE). SHE GUESSED THAT THE GOM WOULD OPT
FOR A LOWER-PROFILE SECURITY PRESENCE ON SATURDAY, WHICH SHE
AGREED WOULD BE A GOOD THING. NOT SO GOOD, SHE SAID, WAS THE
PRESIDENT'S DELIBERATE DECISION TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY TODAY
(FOR A SUMMIT MEETING THAT DOES NOT START UNTIL MONDAY) AND
THUS TO BE ABSENT FROM MADAGASCAR FOR TOMORROW'S
DEMONSTRATION. HER ANALYSIS WAS THAT RAVALOMANANA WANTS TO
DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BECOME A VIOLENT
DEMONSTRATION, OR EVEN A COUP ATTEMPT, AND THUS AVOID
RESPONSIBILITY AND BLAME FOR WHATEVER HAPPENS (WHILE ALSO
ASSURING HIS OWN PHYSICAL SAFETY). COMPARING NOTES, IT WAS

CLEAR THAT RAVALOMANANA HAD CONVENED A MEETING THIS MORNING BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE OF SENIOR SECURITY OFFICIALS -- AT WHICH HE UNDOUBTEDLY GAVE SOME INSTRUCTIONS.

17. (C) COMMENT: THERE IS NO LONGER MUCH QUESTION HERE THAT THE LONG-SIMMERING DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN MAYOR AND PRESIDENT HAS NOW BECOME A FULL-BLOWN POLITICAL CRISIS, EVEN AS -- IN PECULIAR MALAGASY STYLE -- NO SHOT HAS BEEN FIRED OR ANY PERSON INJURED OR JAILED (YET). WITH REGIME CHANGE NOW THE MAYOR'S STATED GOAL, THE GOM WILL BE TEMPTED TO TREAT THIS AS NOTHING LESS THAN AN ILLEGAL COUP ATTEMPT, AND NO DOUBT IS MULLING OVER A RANGE OF RESPONSES INCLUDING SOME HIGHLY FORCEFUL ONES. ALL EYES ARE NOW ON SATURDAY'S DEMONSTRATION: IF IT MANAGES TO PASS PEACEFULLY AND/OR FAILS TO DRAW A SUFFICIENTLY IMPRESSIVE CROWD, TENSIONS MAY START TO FALL AS WEARY MALAGASY RETURN TO THEIR DAILY LIVES AND/OR TGV STARTS TO REALIZE THAT HIS SUPPORT IS WEAKER THAN HE THOUGHT. HOWEVER, WE AND OTHERS REMAIN QUITE NERVOUS ABOUT THE ALTERNATIVE -- A VIOLENT SPARK THAT COULD THEN START BURNING OUT OF CONTROL.
MARQUARDT